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NETWORK

**Deliverable 1.3. Description of the evaluation process,
evaluation criteria, code of conduct, and guidelines and
templates for external reviewers**

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SUMMARY

This deliverable aims at providing a description of the evaluation process that will be implemented to assess transnational access (TA) proposals submitted to POLARIN, and in particular their scientific excellence, their relevance to the call criteria and the adequacy of the proposed field work to the POLARIN TA offer. This process is based on evaluation systems developed by previous EU funded projects for TA to research infrastructures (RIs) and adapted to the heterogeneous nature of RIs in POLARIN.

This document details the steps involved in the evaluation of proposals, and the guidelines for the Scientific Liaison Panel members and international experts, including the evaluation criteria.

1. Introduction

The main objective of this deliverable is to provide a description of the evaluation process, evaluation criteria, code of conduct, and guidelines and templates for external reviewers, following the experiences and best practices already adopted by different European Research Infrastructure networks.

POLARIN will ensure a fair evaluation process by taking all reasonable measures in support of objectivity, transparency, equality of treatment, impartiality, quality and confidentiality.

The POLARIN proposal evaluation system is based on previous EUROFLEETS1, 2 and + (respectively grants no. 228344, 312762 and 824077), as well as ARICE (grant no. 730965) and INTERACT (grant no. 871120) evaluation systems, and follows the experiences and best practices from different European Research Infrastructure application and evaluation procedures.

1.1. The POLARIN Scientific Evaluation Secretariat

The POLARIN Scientific Evaluation Secretariat is based at the Istituto Nazionale di Oceanografia e di Geofisica Sperimentale – OGS in Trieste (Italy). It is a service provided by WP1 to coordinate the scientific evaluation of proposals submitted to POLARIN and it will work in collaboration with WP2 (TA Proposal management service) and the SLP. The contact details of the POLARIN Scientific Evaluation Secretariat are reported at the end of this document.

1.2. The role of the Scientific Liaison Panel

The POLARIN Scientific Liaison Panel (SLP) implemented by POLARIN consists of international experts (more than 50 % external to the POLARIN Consortium, covering all relevant scientific disciplines). It will oversee the scientific evaluation of proposals, supported by independent, external reviewers (see POLARIN Deliverable 1.1. Implementation of the SLP with Terms of Reference). All reasonable measures will be taken to ensure objectivity, transparency, equality of treatment, impartiality, quality and confidentiality. The membership of the POLARIN SLP is personal and public. For more details concerning the Panel's members please consult <http://www.eu-polarin.eu/>

The SLP will play a pivotal role in the selection of proposals by providing the necessary scientific expertise for a proper, independent evaluation. Individual SLP members will act as “watchdogs” for selected proposals nearest to their expertise, following their progress from “application to implementation”.

The scientific evaluation of proposals is coordinated by the Scientific Evaluation Secretariat (WP1) while the logistic evaluation is coordinated by WP2. WP1 and WP2 will work hand in hand to ensure a smooth evaluation process.

2. Steps involved in the evaluation of proposals

The evaluation of proposals consists of different phases: Eligibility Check, Scientific Evaluation, Logistic Evaluation and the Feedback and Negotiation Phase.

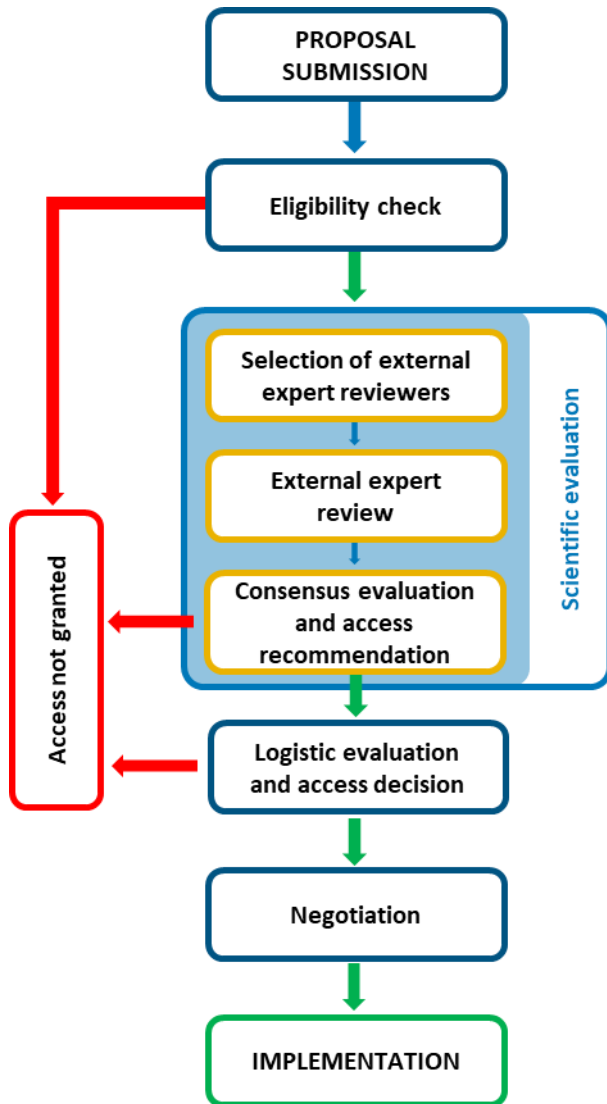


Figure 1: Workflow and different phases involved in the POLARIN evaluation procedure.

2.1. Eligibility Check

Proposals received are first checked for eligibility.

This check includes:

- Was a complete application received on time by the notified submission date?
- Are all sections of the application form completed correctly, the requested proposal structure (Project description) followed and requested appendixes attached?
- Is the proposal complying with the general eligibility criteria? **Eligibility Criteria** are available in D1.2 (Report on Procedure for Provision of Transnational Access).

Proposals considered to be ineligible will not be forwarded to the evaluation phase and will be returned to the applicant with a note explaining why they were considered as not eligible and thus rejected.

2.2. Scientific Evaluation

Only proposals meeting the eligibility criteria are considered for scientific evaluation.

The scientific evaluation comprises the following steps: designation of a watchdog for each proposal, selection of external reviewers, external expert review, consensus evaluation and access recommendation.

2.2.1. Designation of Watchdogs

Each proposal meeting the eligibility criteria is allocated to a specific SLP member, whose expertise is the closest to the respective proposal topic and designated as a “watchdog” of that proposal. These watchdogs will accompany throughout the evaluation process the proposals assigned to them.

2.2.2. Selection of external reviewers

The watchdog will be consulted by the Scientific Evaluation Secretariat to identify the most suitable (external) experts that could evaluate the proposals. In support of this, a list with experts in different fields of polar research has been compiled by WP1 with nominations from POLARIN partners and form the basis of a pool of external experts.

2.2.3. Expert review

Proposals are evaluated by at least two (as a general rule) experts. The external evaluators review the proposal(s) assigned to them and score and comment each proposal for each of the **Evaluation Criteria** (see below chapter 3) in POLARIN Transnational Access Platform (TAP).

Individual members from the SLP may perform scientific evaluations if the proposal falls within their field of expertise.

The names of the external experts or SLP members assigned to individual proposals are not made public.

The evaluators are required to declare NO conflict of interest and to agree with confidentiality clause before reviewing their assigned POLARIN proposals.

2.2.4. Consensus Evaluation and access recommendation

Once the individual experts have completed their evaluations, the watchdog will draft a short statement summarizing the external expert reviews and providing a suggestion for access recommendation for the SLP members to agree at the Consensus Meeting on the proposals that are recommended for funding.

Thresholds will then be set for the following categories:

A - Recommended for access and proceeding to logistic evaluation by the RI.

B - Not recommended for access

In case several proposals are recommended for funding for the same infrastructure, a recommendation will be issued by the SLP to consider the prioritisation criteria provided in D1.2, and below in Section 3.

In case of conflict of interest of any of the SLP members with any of the proposals under review, these members will be excluded from the discussion of that proposal.

2.3. Logistic Evaluation and access decision

Proposals recommended for access by the SLP will be examined by the relevant RI operators to evaluate the logistical feasibility of the proposed work, use of equipment, area of operation and timing of access. POLARIN Infrastructure Operators Forum (IOF) will convene on line to provide consultation and support in the process and discuss proposals to multiple RIs.

The RI operators, after reviewing the proposals recommended to their RI and receiving consultation from the IOF meeting, submit a short Logistic Evaluation Statement on the proposals to the POLARIN on-line TA Platform, together with their access decision.

The stage of the proposal in the evaluation process (i.e. "submitted", "eligibility check", "in evaluation") is visible to the applicants on the Proposal Management Platform. No information on the evaluation outcome is available to the applicants before the access decision is announced.

The logistic evaluation of proposals is described in detail in D2.1.

2.4. Negotiation

All applicants, whether successful or unsuccessful, will receive feedback on the outcome in the form of an Evaluation Summary. This will include the Consensus Evaluation Statement, and the Logistic Evaluation Statement discussed by the IOF. This will be made available to the applicants, together with the access decision, on the POLARIN on-line TA platform.

Proposals accepted for implementation by the respective RI operators, may go through a negotiation phase to adjust the implementation conditions to recommendations by the SLP or the RI operators and will be finally invited to sign an Agreement with the POLARIN Consortium and with the RI where access is granted.

3. Guidelines for SLP members and evaluators

3.1. Evaluation criteria

Access to any infrastructure in POLARIN will be regulated according to the excellence-driven access mode¹. This mode of access is dependent on the scientific excellence, originality, quality and technical

¹ European Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures, doi:10.2777/524573

and ethical feasibility of an application evaluated by international experts. In this way, POLARIN ensures that only scientifically excellent proposals are considered for funding.

Eligible proposals will be evaluated by international experts using the following criteria:

Criteria	Scoring	Weighting
1) Background and objectives: Scientific quality of the planned research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the current state of knowledge in the research area well described? Will the proposal substantially contribute to knowledge beyond the state of the art? Is the research innovative? Are the research objectives and expected deliverables clearly stated and realistic from a scientific point of view? 	1-5	30%
2) Scientific and societal impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the expected scientific and societal impact well addressed? Is the proposed research contributing to addressing the key research priorities in polar regions? is this clearly explained? To what extent is the proposed project embedded and contributing into larger research programmes on a national, EU or international level?* 	1-5	10%
3) Quality of the work plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the methodology and the work plan clearly described and adequate for the objectives? Is the work plan feasible considering resources (manpower/equipment) and time? Are ethical issues, logistic needs and research permits required clearly identified? For larger user-groups (4 members or more) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Is the proposed work multidisciplinary? (2) Does the proposed project maximise the use of the requested infrastructure(s)? Is the number of users accessing the infrastructure and their contribution justified? 	1-5	15%

Criteria	Scoring	Weighting
4) Scientific competence of the user-group leader and user-group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the background/track record of the user-group leader sound enough, in proportion to his/her career stage? Are the roles and responsibilities of the user-group clearly stated? Is the user-group solid, complementary and suitable to achieve the objectives of the proposed research? Are early career researchers included in the user-group? 	1-5	15%
5) Expected results and possible risks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the expected results achievable and adequately described? Has the research potential for scientific breakthroughs? Are potential risks and contingency plans well addressed? 	1-5	15%
6) Exploitation of results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a realistic plan for scientific publications? Is there funding or other kind of support available or being requested for a proper exploitation of gathered data and samples? Will the project contribute to making data FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable)? Are dissemination activities and public outreach planned, during and after the access, to rise awareness among potential end-users, the scientific community and the general public? 	1-5	15%

* Not relevant if the user-group leader is an Early Career Researcher.

3.2. Scoring

External experts will insert their reviews in the POLARIN TAP and **score each subsection between 1 and 5** as follows:

1 – Poor: The proposal shows serious weaknesses in relation to the criterion in question.

2 – Fair: The proposal generally addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses that need corrections.

3 – Good: The proposal addresses the criterion in question well, but certain improvements are necessary.

4 – Very Good: The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but small improvements are possible.

5 – Excellent: The proposal successfully addresses all aspects of the criterion in question.

In general, a threshold for scientific excellency will be observed at a value of 4.

Applicants must ensure that sufficient information is provided in the proposal to enable a thorough evaluation against all evaluation criteria.

Expert reviews are inserted directly in the POLARIN TAP according to the evaluation criteria stated above.

3.3. Access priorities

The selection of user groups is based on scientific excellence, but **at equal scientific merits the SLP will give implementation priority** to user groups composed of users who:

- (i) have not previously used the installation,
- (ii) are working in countries where no equivalent research infrastructure exists

POLARIN encourages the submission of proposals that consider:

- multidisciplinary and multinational user groups, requesting either a combination of RIs or with a two-pole approach.
- User groups with gender balance and involvement of early career researchers (undergraduate, graduate or post-graduate level up to 5 years active in science after last degree).
- Ukrainian researchers from government-controlled territories as user-group leaders.

3.4. Code of conduct

The SLP will apply the principles of transparency, fairness and impartiality.

External experts and members of the SLP will be asked to declare if they have any conflict of interest with any of the proposals they are asked to evaluate.

Declaration of conflict of interest

If you believe you may directly benefit financially, professionally or personally from the success or failure of this proposal, you should not review this proposal and should contact the POLARIN Scientific Evaluation Secretariat as soon as possible.

You should also refrain from reviewing the proposal if you have published together with the applicant or the co-workers within the past five years, if you are currently cooperating or if professional dependencies exist, or if you have any other potential indirect interest, you should contact the POLARIN Scientific Evaluation Secretariat and inform about your conflict of interest. Your conflict-of-interest declaration will be used solely by the POLARIN Scientific Evaluation Secretariat and will not be disclosed elsewhere.

Normal scientific interaction, e.g. at conferences, workshops, professional activities etc., doesn't need to be declared.

The POLARIN Scientific Evaluation Secretariat will carefully consider the level (and/or perceived level) of your interest and will inform you if you can continue to review the proposal.

4. Protection of Personal Data

Personal information supplied to the POLARIN Consortium will be stored by electronic means (e.g. database) for use only in connection with the handling of proposals, provision of access and project reporting. All personal data supplied to the POLARIN Consortium shall be processed in accordance with the highest ethical standards and all applicable international, EU and national law (in particular, the GDPR, national data protection laws and other relevant legislation). It will ensure fairness, transparency and accountability of the data processing, data quality and confidentiality.

5. Contact details

POLARIN Scientific Evaluation Secretariat

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